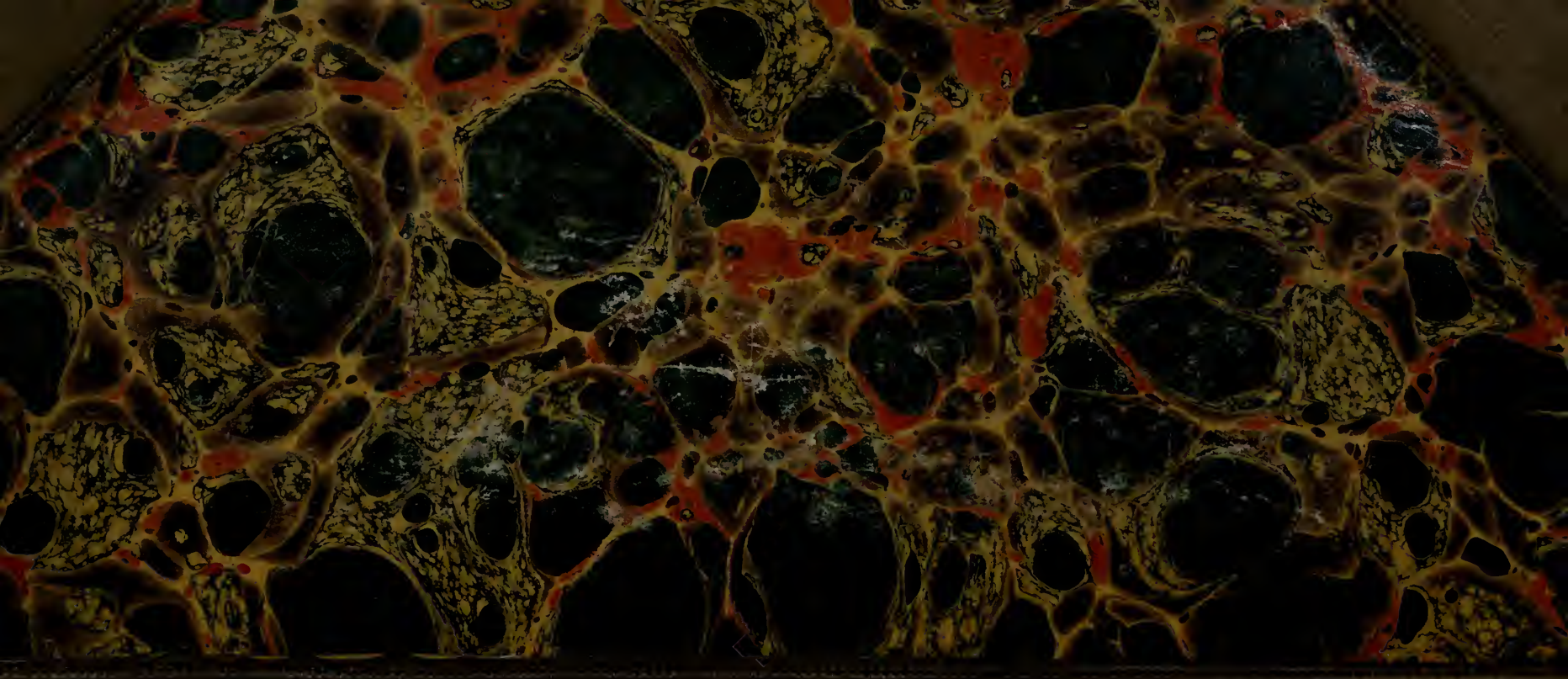

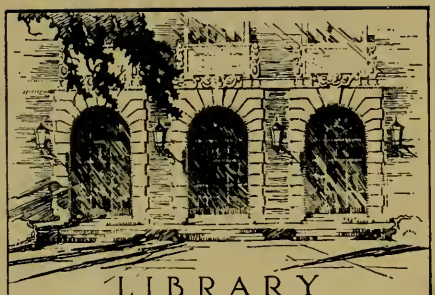

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[Publication No. XIX.]

THE

MINISTERIAL CRISIS.

SPEECHES

OF THE

RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P.,

AND THE

RIGHT HON. B. DISRAELI, M.P.

(THE LATTER REVISED BY AUTHORITY).

PUBLISHED BY THE
NATIONAL UNION OF CONSERVATIVE AND CONSTITUTIONAL
ASSOCIATIONS,
PARLIAMENT STREET, WESTMINSTER.

March, 1873.

London:
Printed by the Central Press Company (Limited),
112, Strand, W.C.

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

THURSDAY, MARCH 20TH, 1873.

MR. GLADSTONE :—I am now able to acquaint the House that those who were my colleagues in the Cabinet until the vote of Wednesday morning last, have consented, and have received Her Majesty's gracious permission, to resume the administration of the offices which they respectively held (cheers), and that we are prepared to carry on the work of the Government as before. But, Sir, a desire was naturally felt and expressed in many quarters, after the very succinct statements which were made to the House by myself, and subsequently by the right hon. gentleman opposite, for some further information as to the manner in which the time was occupied between Thursday afternoon in last week, when the right hon. gentleman, as he has stated, declined to undertake the formation of a Government, and Sunday evening, when I felt it my duty to place any services I could render at the disposal of Her Majesty. I will endeavour, very succinctly, but I hope, very clearly, to explain both the facts and the causes connected with the lapse of time. On Friday morning I had the honour to receive from Her Majesty, in writing, the reply which had been submitted to Her Majesty by the right hon. gentleman ; and Her Majesty was pleased to ask for my advice thereupon. Upon examining that reply I doubted whether I could collect its effect with all the precision which was obviously requisite before I could proceed to tender advice to Her Majesty founded upon it. I, therefore, answered Her Majesty's reference to the effect that I did not feel quite certain as to the purport of that reply. On Friday evening I received a communication from Her Majesty, which, as I stated on Monday, completely put an end to any doubt I might have entertained, and satisfied me that that reply was an unconditional refusal on the part of the right hon. gentleman to take office. Thereupon, I thought it my duty to submit a statement to Her Majesty, the nature of which I will presently explain. That statement I prepared on Friday evening, and sent to Her Majesty on Saturday, and it was made known by Her Majesty to the right hon. gentleman opposite. Her Majesty received the reply of the right hon. gentleman at Windsor early in

the evening of Sunday, and at ten o'clock on the same evening Her Majesty transmitted to me that reply, together with Her Majesty's inquiry whether I was prepared to resume my office in the Government. Having read the reply, I believed its nature to be perfectly unequivocal. It removed from my mind the last vestige of expectation I had entertained that a Government might be formed by the efforts of the party opposite ; and, therefore, without any delay whatever, on the same evening, I returned an answer to Her Majesty to the effect that I would endeavour to arrange for the reconstruction of, or the resumption of office by the Government which had previously served Her Majesty. That task I undertook on Monday, and it has now been completed. (Hear, hear.) I have given thus far merely what I may term the chronology of the case. I said that, on learning that the reply tendered by the right hon. gentleman on Thursday amounted to an unconditional negative, I felt it my duty to prepare and submit to Her Majesty a statement upon that subject. There was a difference of opinion, in truth, between the right hon. gentleman and myself as to the precise measure of what might be expected from a party in Opposition under the circumstances in which the overthrow of the Government had occurred. I do not consider that I am here to assert the correctness of my own view of the case or to enter into any discussion whatever with regard to it. It may be a perfectly proper and legitimate subject for the consideration of Parliament should Parliament be disposed to take it into consideration. But my duty now is simply historical, and I do not wish, so far as it depends upon me, to say anything which can by possibility lead to controversy on this occasion. I will, therefore, state the opinion I entertain, which differs from the opinion of the right hon. gentleman, simply by reading, with Her Majesty's permission, an extract from the statement which, as I have said, I submitted to Her Majesty on Saturday. The statement contained a rather lengthened reference to what had occurred on the occasions of previous changes of Government. To all those references I shall now make no allusion, but shall read the passage in which the view I took of the case is set out :—

"It is in Mr. Gladstone's view of the utmost importance to the public welfare that the nation should be constantly aware that the Parliamentary action certain or likely to take effect in the overthrow of a Government, the reception and treatment of a summons from your Majesty to meet the necessity which such action has powerfully aided in creating, and again the resumption of office by those who have deliberately laid it down, are uniformly viewed as matters of the utmost gravity, requiring time, counsel, and deliberation among those who are parties to them, and attended with serious responsibilities. Mr. Gladstone will not and does not suppose that the efforts of the Opposition to defeat the Government on Wednesday morning were made with a previously formed intention on their part to refuse any aid to your Majesty, if the need should arise, in providing for the Government of the

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country ; and the summary refusal, which is the only fact before him, he takes to be not in full correspondence, either with the exigencies of the case or, as he has shewn, with Parliamentary usage. In humbly submitting this representation to your Majesty, Mr. Gladstone's wish is to point out the difficulties in which he would find himself placed where he to ask your Majesty for authority to inquire from his late colleagues whether they, or any of them, were prepared, if your Majesty should call on them, to resume their offices, for they would certainly, he is persuaded, call on him, for their own honour, and in order to the usefulness of their further service if it should be rendered, to prove to them that according to usage every means had been exhausted on the part of the Opposition for providing for the Government of the country, or, at least, that nothing more was to be expected from that quarter."

Sir, the conclusion at which I arrived on Sunday evening was distinctly and definitely this—that nothing more was to be expected from that quarter, and consequently I thought the time had arrived when it was my duty unequivocally and at once to tender to her Majesty my humble services. It has been remarked by many, and probably by impartial observers, that the delay which occurred between Thursday and Sunday was due to my reluctance to resume office. I can only say it was not consciously due to such reluctance. I should never think that a sentiment of this kind, whatever might be its value, was a reason for delay in settling a question material to the interests of the country. (Hear, hear.) At the same time I do not disguise the fact that I felt reluctance, and I may have been unconsciously influenced by it. I felt it personally, from a desire for rest (cheers), the title to which had possibly been in some degree earned, so far as it can be earned, by labour. (Cheers.) I felt this reluctance also because I do not think that, as a general rule, the experience we have had in former years of what may be called returning or resuming Governments has been very favourable in its character. There was a case in 1832 when the Government of Lord Grey, after a crisis in the House of Lords, returned to office, and returned even with augmented vigour, to pursue their task. But that was a case in which the Government returned to take up again the Bill upon which the crisis had occurred and carry it to a successful conclusion. Since that time there have been similar cases in which Governments after resigning have returned to office. I do not wish to refer to them in particular, but I think that the subsequent fortunes of such Governments lead to the belief that, upon the whole, though such a return may be the lesser of two evils, yet it is not a thing in itself to be desired. (Hear, hear.) It reminds me of that which was described by the Roman General according to a noble ode of Horace :—

" Neque amissos colores
" Lana refert, medicata fuco ;
" Nec vera virtus, cum semel excidit,
" Curat reponi deterioribus."

(Hear, hear.) And I am bound to say that there is a special consideration

which likewise aided to inspire and strengthen the same feeling in my mind on the present occasion, because we must all feel that the relations of the party in Opposition to the party in Office, after what has occurred, and after the negative answer given to Her Majesty—I am not now insinuating any opinion as to the propriety of the negative, but am simply refering to the fact—the position even of the Opposition itself relatively to the Government is to some extent modified ; and I greatly doubt whether that modification is of a character likely to contribute to the efficient and satisfactory working of our system of Parliamentary Government. (Hear, hear.) Such, Sir, are the views which undoubtedly I entertain and which possibly may have influenced my conduct in a manner more decided than I have been myself aware of. But we have resumed our offices and, having resumed our offices, we shall endeavour fully and honourably to discharge the duties appertaining to them. (Cheers.) We have resumed our offices with the belief that there is nothing in the events which occurred last week to warrant us in arriving at any conclusion whatever—any special conclusion whatever—with regard to the duration of the existence of the present Parliament, as connected with any particular course of business or any particular limit of time. (Cheers, and some murmurs.) In that respect we stand now as we stood before, prepared to abide the course of events and to act as they may require. (Hear, hear.) But I have felt it my duty to say this much upon the subject because nothing can be more inconvenient and more injurious to the country than the prevalence of a floating, indefinite opinion (cheers) of an intention—not avowed by the Government, and not distinctly disavowed—to bring the present Parliament as soon as possible to a conclusion. (Cheers.) Such an intention is, I trust, now distinctly disavowed (hear, hear), but of course I need not say that we retain the liberty which is at all times essential to the discharge of the functions of a Government. (Hear, hear.) We shall endeavour to proceed, both with respect to legislation and administration, in the same manner and upon the same principles as those which have heretofore governed our conduct, and we shall address ourselves to the discharge of our arduous public duties, relying stedfastly upon the continued confidence and support of the House of Commons. (Loud cheers.)

Mr. Disraeli :—Before I refer to the allusions which the right hon. gentleman has made to some controversial elements which during the last few days may have arisen between him and myself, with respect either to the conduct of this side of the House in reference to the recent vote, or my own in declining the high responsibility which Her Majesty graciously suggested to me to undertake, I think it may be convenient that I should as clearly as I can place before the House exactly what

part I have taken in these recent transactions, and give fully the reasons for the counsel which I presumed to offer Her Majesty under the circumstances. It was on this day week, when I was about to enter the House of Commons, that I had the honour of receiving a letter from the Queen informing me that Mr. Gladstone—I am correct in mentioning the right hon. gentleman's name (Hear, hear)—had just then quitted the Palace, having offered his own resignation and that of his colleagues to Her Majesty in consequence of the vote at which the House of Commons arrived on the preceding Tuesday, and that Her Majesty had accepted those resignations. The Queen inquired from me whether I would undertake to form a Government, and commanded my attendance at the Palace. When I was in audience I inquired of Her Majesty whether she wished that I should give a categorical answer to the question asked in Her Majesty's letter, or whether she desired that I should enter fully into the political situation. Her Majesty was graciously pleased to say that she should like to have an answer to that question, and that afterwards she wished me fully and freely to speak upon the present condition of affairs. The question being whether I would undertake to form a Government, I at once said that I believed I should have no material difficulty in forming an Administration which could carry on the affairs of this country with efficiency, and be entitled to Her Majesty's confidence, but that I could not undertake to conduct Her Majesty's affairs in the present House of Commons. (Hear, hear.) After that I proceeded, with Her Majesty's permission, to lay before the Queen the reasons which had induced me to arrive at this conclusion; and I will now, in as succinct a manner as I can, give these reasons to the House. I called Her Majesty's attention to the fact that although the course of the public elections during the last two years had shewn, in a manner which I think must be acknowledged by all impartial persons, that there was a change, and even a considerable change, in public opinion and in favour of the party with whom I have the honour to act in Parliament—(Hear, hear)—still it was a fact which ought to be placed clearly before Her Majesty that the right hon. gentleman opposite, notwithstanding all these gains by the Conservative party, was supported by a very large majority, and that I could not place that majority at a figure which could be accurately expressed unless I stated that it approached more nearly to 90 than 80. I believe I was correct in saying the majority of the right hon. gentleman was 88. Then I called the attention of the Queen to the fact that the recent division indicated no elements to which I could look with any confidence to obtain subsidiary or extraneous aid which would in any considerable degree, or perhaps in any degree whatever, modify the numerical position of the right hon. gentleman (Hear, hear); that the discomfiture of the Government was caused,

and the majority against them created, by the vote of a considerable section of the Liberal party, consisting of Irish members, who might fairly be described as representing the Roman Catholic interest, and that there was no common bond of union between myself and that party. (Loud Opposition cheers.) I stated that they would act, and most honourably act, with a view to effect the object which they wish to accomplish, namely, the establishment of a Roman Catholic University ; that in my opinion that question had been definitively decided by the nation at the last General Election ; but that, totally irrespective of that national decision, events had occurred in Parliament since which rendered it quite impossible for me to listen to any suggestions of the kind, because, since the last General Election, the endowments of the Protestant Church of Ireland had been taken away from it (cheers)—a policy which I entirely disapproved, which I had resisted, and which they had supported (Hear, hear), and which, having been carried into effect, offered in my mind a permanent and insurmountable barrier to the policy which they wished to see pursued. (Hear, hear.) Under these circumstances, I had to place before Her Majesty that I with my colleagues should have to conduct her affairs in a House of Commons with a most powerful majority arrayed against us. I had to point out to Her Majesty that this was a position of affairs of which I had some personal experience (laughter and cheers) ; that I believed it to be one detrimental to the public interest (hear, hear) ; that it permitted abstract resolutions on political affairs to be brought forward by persons who had no political responsibility, and that those resolutions were referred to afterwards, and precipitated the solution of great public questions which were not ripe for settlement. I represented to Her Majesty that this was a state of affairs which diminished authority, weakened Government, certainly added no lustre to the Crown, but, above all, destroyed that general public confidence which is the most vigorous and legitimate source of power. (Hear, hear.) Under these circumstances I felt it my duty to ask Her Majesty graciously to relieve me from the task which she had suggested to my consideration.

Now, Sir, it will be asked, and has been asked, no doubt, in every street and every chamber in this town, why, when being able to form an efficient Administration, and having been summoned to the Councils of Her Majesty deprived of the assistance of her previous advisers, the only obstacle before me being that I had to encounter a hostile majority in the House of Commons—it will be asked, I say, why, under these circumstances, I did not advise Her Majesty to dissolve Parliament. To that point, with the permission of the House, I will now address myself. Sir, a Dissolution of Parliament is a political function respecting which considerable misconception exists. It is supposed to be an act which can be performed with great promptitude, and which is a resource to which a Minister may

recur with the utmost facility. But the fact is that great mistakes prevail respecting this important exercise of the Prerogative. A Dissolution of Parliament is a very different instrument in different hands. It is an instrument of which a Minister in office, with his Government established, can avail himself with a facility of which a Minister who is only going to accede to office is deprived. (Hear, hear.) A Minister in office, having his Government formed, with many indications probably of the critical circumstances which may render it imperative on him to advise the Sovereign to exercise this Prerogative, has the opportunity of disposing of the public business preparatory to the act which he advises. But the position of a Minister who is only going to accede to office is in this respect very different. In the first place, he has to form his Administration, and that is a work of great time, of great labour, and of great responsibility. (Hear, hear.) It is not confined merely to the construction of a Cabinet, which, when you are honoured by the confidence of many companions in public life, is often the least difficult part of the task; but it requires communication with probably more than fifty individuals, all of them persons of consideration, with whom you must personally confer. The construction of a Ministry falls entirely on the individual entrusted with its formation. It is a duty which can be delegated to no one. All the correspondence and all the interviews must be conducted by himself, and, without dwelling on the sense of responsibility involved, the perception of fitness requisite, and the severe impartiality necessary in deciding on contending claims, the mere physical effort is not slight. As a matter of time it materially affects the position of the Government. Now, in the present case it would not have been possible for me to have formed a Government and to have placed it on that bench and in the other House in working gear until Easter. Well, the holidays would have intervened. After the holidays it might have been possible, by having recourse to methods I greatly disapprove—namely, provisional finance, by votes of credit, or rather votes on account, and by taking a step which, for reasons I will afterwards give, I highly reprobate—namely, accepting the Estimates of our predecessors—it might have been possible to have dissolved Parliament in the early part of the month of May. But when the month of May arrived, this question would occur—what are you going to dissolve Parliament about? (Cheers.) There was no particular issue before the country. (Cheers.) At least it cannot be pretended for a moment that there was any one of those issues before the country that have previously justified extraordinary Dissolutions of Parliament—questions which the country wished passionately to decide, and when in a political exigency of that kind a Minister is perfectly justified in having recourse to provisional finance, or any other means by which he can obtain the earliest decision of the country. (Hear, hear.) I wish the House for a moment to consider impartially what

was the real position of affairs. Her Majesty's Ministers had resigned. Her Majesty had called on the leader of the Opposition to form a Ministry, while he had nearly a majority of ninety arrayed against him. It was in his opinion necessary, of course, in the circumstances to appeal to the country, in order that that majority might be changed, probably into one, though perhaps not of that amount (a laugh), in his favour. (Cheers.) But if that be the real state of the case—if there were no issue before the country—for I do not suppose any one would maintain that the Irish University Bill was a question on which we could dissolve—the right hon. gentleman, by dissolving, might have wished to punish those who voted against him, but I could not take that course, for I was one of the criminals (cheers and a laugh)—if the case be as I state, that we could not carry on affairs without an appeal to the country upon grounds which would justify the constituencies in giving us a majority, is it not quite clear that we could not appeal to the country without having a matured and complete policy? (Cheers and counter cheers.) Hon. gentlemen opposite may laugh at the word "policy;" but I would suggest that it is impossible for those who sit on the Opposition bench suddenly to have a matured policy to present to the people of this country in case Parliament is dissolved. (Cheers.) An Opposition, of whatever party it may be formed, is essentially a critical body: it is not a constructive one, and it cannot be. Upon all the great subjects of the day, no doubt, gentlemen sitting on this side of the House have certain views and principles which guide them in dealing with the circumstances and measures before Parliament; but they must know that on all these questions they cannot for a moment rival the information possessed by a Government. However they may wish to do their duty to this House and offer their views and arguments for discussion, there is a degree of information which it is impossible to obtain by any but a Minister. Take a case illustrative of this. There is the question of our relations at this moment with Central Asia. No one will deny for a moment that this is a question of the highest importance—(Hear, hear);—it is one in some degree of instant interest, but still more grave from its ultimate consequences. If there was a discussion of the Central Asian question I myself, or my friends around me, might presume to offer our opinions to the House; but, so far as I am concerned, I should speak, as I trust I do on all matters of foreign policy, with reserve and unaffected diffidence, because I know very well that, were I to cross the floor of this House and enter the archives of Downing-street, I should find information there which I do not now possess, which might modify, nay, entirely change, my views, which might render it even necessary that, after much deliberation, we should place ourselves in communication with agents and authorities, and that we might even have to shape a particular course. All this cannot be done in a moment. And yet, how could we dissolve Parliament,

and appeal to the country for its confidence, without guiding it on a subject which, although the English people are not fanatically anxious to interfere in foreign affairs, unquestionably much occupies the public mind, and especially of those thoughtful classes who influence opinion. (Hear, hear.) And yet until we were in office, and had the means of considering and maturing our policy on the subject, the House must feel that would have been impossible. We should have had to go on that and other matters with a blank sheet of paper to the constituencies. Would that, I ask, have been an appeal becoming us to make to a sensible people like the English nation? (Cheers.) Take another question. My right hon. friend the member for the University of Oxford (Mr. Gathorne Hardy) has given notice of a motion, upon a subject infinitely more important than any Irish University question—(Hear, hear),—which concerns the highest interests of the country—one on which it is, in my opinion, the duty of a Minister to take a decided course, and arrive at a precise resolution—I speak of those three rules which Her Majesty's Government are attempting to introduce into International Law, which touch most intimately the rights of neutrals, and if misinterpreted must injuriously affect this country. (Hear, hear.) How would it be possible to appeal to the people of England so to exercise their suffrages that they should convert the large majority of the right hon. gentlemen opposite into a majority in favour of those who sit on this side of the House if we blinked giving our opinion on that vast question? (Cheers.) They would say, you appeal to the country, you ask for our confidence—what do you mean to do about that mysterious and perplexing question of the three new rules proposed to be introduced into International Law which affect all the rights of neutrals, and on which the position of this country may ultimately depend? It is clear that on such a matter we must speak with decision and act with energy. (Cheers.) How are we to do that unless we have the opportunity of investigating affairs with the information which is only at the command of a Minister who can then come forward with a policy for which he is ready to be responsible? (Cheers.) I do not wish to push the case with regard to foreign affairs farther, but I would remind the House that there is also the question of the mode of payment of the compensation money awarded by the Tribunal of Geneva. (Hear, hear.) That also is a question in which the country wants to be guided and instructed by a Ministry. (Cheers.) There is, however, one other point I cannot help noticing, and that is the French Treaty of Commerce. I have endeavoured to follow the negotiations with respect to that Treaty, but I confess I feel somewhat at sea with regard to them. I really do not know the engagements into which the Government are about to enter, but it is a subject of vast interest to the country. (Hear, hear.) Judging from

the communications made to me within the last week from the great seats of industry, no Minister could dissolve without speaking on that subject in a precise and definite manner. (Cheers.)

I mentioned to the House just now the necessity, in case we dissolved Parliament in the month of May—which would be the earliest possible period—of accepting the Estimates of our predecessors, which are on the table. As a general rule, and at all times, I highly reprobate that course. Nothing but a political exigency, nothing but the existence of a question on which the country is passionately determined to have an instant decision, can justify a Minister in taking that course. But look to our particular position with respect to this subject. You must remember that at the last General Election the country was particularly appealed to on the head of Expenditure. (Cheers.) The Expenditure of the Government of which I was the head was denounced as "profligate;" and the manner in which it was so held up to the people of this country greatly influenced the Elections —(cheers)—quite as much as the question of that unfortunate institution, the Irish Church, the spoliation of which, I believe, is not now so popular as it was at that time. (Cheers.) I speak with due diffidence on the point; there are alterations made in the mode of keeping the accounts since the Election of 1868; but, making all the deductions I can on this head, it does not appear to me that the expenditure of the country at the present moment is less than it was when it was denounced at the Election of 1868. I certainly do not wish on this occasion to make any charge against the present Government; but this I may say, it is a subject most important and interesting to the people of England, and one which, if I were a responsible Minister to-morrow, it would be my first task and effort to scrutinize with a view to find out whether there was any ground for the denunciation of the expenditure of 1868, and whether there are adequate grounds for the expenditure which at present prevails. This is a most grave business, which cannot be done in a moment. The Estimates of this country cannot and ought not to be settled by a few Treasury clerks. I have endeavoured to impress upon the House more than once—and generally speaking the principle has been accepted—that Expenditure depends upon policy; and, therefore, before we could decide what was the fitting expenditure of the country, especially in armaments, we must be minutely and accurately informed what are our engagements and relations with the various Powers of the world. If it be true that Expenditure depends upon policy, I beg the House to remember that, since I was at the head of public affairs, the greatest Revolution has happened in Europe since the first great French Revolution at the end of the last century. Much greater changes have occurred in Europe since the Government of 1868 than were effected by the Congress and the Treaty of Vienna. The Congress and Treaty of Vienna left

the boundaries of France untouched ; they left Germany divided among a variety of Princes and Potentates ; they left a divided Italy ; and they left Rome in the possession of the Pope. All these conditions have changed ; and many of the most important considerations that the Government of the day had to enter into when they decided upon our armaments in 1867 and 1868 are entirely changed. I do not mean to say there may not be new quarters in which it may be necessary to take precautions ; but the House will, I think, on reflection, agree with me that all the data upon which the expenditure for our armaments was calculated in 1868 are entirely changed. The consideration of these subjects would be a task which a new Government must enter into heartily, sincerely, and thoroughly. It would be impossible to go to the country, especially upon this subject of Expenditure, in perfect silence, and offer only a blank sheet. It is quite clear, if that be the case, we have first of all to consider the engagements and relations of this country with foreign Powers ; secondly, whether our armaments are efficient and sufficientfor the purpose ; and, thirdly, whether that efficiency and sufficiency have been attained in the most economical manner. Is this an affair that can be accomplished with the facility with which, sitting on an Opposition bench, you can write an address to your constituents ? The House will see that, before making an appeal to the country, it would be necessary that we should encounter preliminary duties of the gravest responsibility. I go further on this head. However anxious a Government may be, in the contemplation of a Dissolution of Parliament, to wind up public affairs, however anxious they may be to discharge only those duties which seem absolutely necessary for carrying on the public service, I have observed that there is always some large question which cannot be shelved or shunted, either from the peculiar interest which the country takes in it, or the engagements of successive Ministers, and sometimes, and not uncommonly, from its indirect influence upon Imperial finance ; and there is one of those questions now —there is the question of Local Taxation. It would be impossible for a Ministry formed from the benches on either side, certainly from these benches, to go to the country and to be silent on the question of Local Taxation. It is no light matter to grapple with. It is possible, I give no opinion on that head now, that in attempting to settle it, you may have to interfere with your Imperial finance, and that a Budget may be affected by it. Well, what is the upshot ? (Hear.) The upshot is that if we had accepted office we should have had to conduct the affairs of Her Majesty's Government in Parliament for the whole Session, and for a Session of no ordinary length, and I was not prepared to take a step of that kind. I know from experience, as I mentioned before, what is the consequence to a party and to the public interest, of endeavouring to

carry on the Government of the country in a House in which a large majority is arrayed against you. I am not referring to the period when I had the honour to introduce and conduct through the House a Bill to amend the Representation of the People. I said then, and I say now, I think that the conduct of the House to Her Majesty's Ministers was independent, generous, and spirited. To that Bill the right hon. gentleman opposite, as the leader of the Opposition, offered an uncompromising opposition. I had the assistance of the House, and that Bill was triumphantly read a second time; and after the Easter holidays, when the right hon. gentleman rallied his forces and himself brought forward a motion which, if carried, would have been fatal to it, the right hon. gentleman was singularly defeated. Therefore, it is a perversion of terms to say that at that time we were carrying on the Government with a minority, because on critical occasions we had a majority, and the leader of the Opposition was defeated. (Hear, hear.) But, Sir, I have had some experience of conducting the Government really in a minority. I take the case of the Government of 1852. It is well known that Lord Derby was most disinclined to take office. He had declined it in 1851 under circumstances most painful to himself. The Queen was left for forty-eight hours without a Government. In 1852 Lord Derby was obliged to take office; yet before he took it he made overtures to Lord Palmerston to construct a Government with him; and Lord Palmerston, who seemed not unwilling to assist my noble friend, declined, on the ground that he had no friends. (Laughter.) A man whom we all remember as the most popular Minister in England gravely, and I believe sincerely, gave that as his reason. I believe Lord Derby on that occasion made overtures also to the right hon. gentleman opposite. [Mr. Gladstone: "No."] At all events he spared no pains, and I know that to many gentlemen who were not in political association with him he made overtures. Lord Derby was obliged to take the reins of Government. He formed a Cabinet of individuals who had never been in office; and the leadership of this House, for the only time, I believe, since the days of Lord Shelburne, was entrusted to an individual who had not the slightest official experience. If ever there was an occasion, one would think, for generous treatment on the part of the House of Commons, however great the majority might be, that was the instance. But what happened? The moment he took office the supplies were voted for six months only, forcing him to call Parliament together in November, when he was obliged to bring forward remedial measures essentially financial, and when the permanent officers of the Government declared that the Estimates could only be imaginary. I know well, and those who are around me know well, what will occur when a Ministry takes office and attempts to carry on the Government with a minority during the Session with the view of ultimately appealing to the people.

We should have what is called "fair play." That is to say no vote of want of confidence should be proposed, and chiefly because it would be of no use. There would be no wholesale censure, but retail humiliation. A right hon. gentleman will come down here, he will arrange his thumb-screws and other instruments of torture on this table—(laughter)—we shall never ask for a vote without a lecture, we shall never perform the most ordinary routine office of Government without there being annexed to it some pedantic and ignominious condition. ("No, no," and cheers.) I wish to express nothing but what I know from painful personal experience. (Laughter.) No expression of the kind I have just encountered could divest me of the painful memory; I wish it could. I wish it was not my duty to take this view of the case. In a certain time we should enter into the Paradise of abstract resolutions. One day hon. gentlemen cannot withstand the golden opportunity of asking the House to affirm that the Income Tax should no longer form one of the features of our Ways and Means. Of course a proposition of that kind would be scouted by the right hon. gentleman and all his colleagues; but then they might dine out that day—(laughter)—and the resolution might be carried, as resolutions of that kind have been. Then another gentleman, distinguished for his knowledge of men and things, would move that the Diplomatic Service be abolished. While hon. gentlemen opposite were laughing in their sleeves at the mover, they would vote for the motion in order to put the Government into a minority. (Renewed laughter.) For this reason:—"Why should men," they would say, "govern the country who are in a minority?" totally forgetting that we acceded to office in the spirit of the Constitution, quite oblivious of the fountain and origin of the position we occupied, and it would go very hard if on some sultry afternoon some member should not "rush in where angels fear to tread" and successfully assimilate the borough and the county franchise. (Loud cheers.) And so things would go on until the bitter end—until at last even the Appropriation Bill has passed, Parliament is dissolved, and we appeal to those millions who perhaps six months before might have looked upon us as the vindicators of intolerable grievances, but who now receive us as a defeated, discredited, and degraded Ministry whose services can be neither of value to the Crown nor a credit to the nation. (Hear.) Well, Sir, with these views, I think the House cannot be surprised that I should have felt it my duty, in concurrence with all those with whom I have acted in public life, humbly to represent to Her Majesty that I did not think it would be for the public advantage or for the honour of the Crown that under such circumstances—namely, the existence of a powerful majority against us—we should attempt to conduct Her Majesty's affairs.

Having announced that, I did not feel it my duty to recommend

Her Majesty to dissolve Parliament. I might, so far as Parliamentary precedent is concerned, here drop this subject; but there have been misconceptions on this head which I wish to remove, and therefore I may be allowed to say that Her Majesty on this occasion—with that judicial impartiality which she displays to all who serve her—(hear, hear)—when, after the enumeration of these difficulties, I hesitated in accepting the offer that was so graciously made to me, did impress upon me that if I undertook the task I might count upon her most cordial support, and that if a dissolution could at all assist me I might depend upon the exercise of the Royal Prerogative for that result. (Hear, hear.) However, I was obliged to represent to Her Majesty, by means of the details which I have given you, though not, perhaps, at so much technical length—(a laugh)—that a dissolution of Parliament would not remove the obstacles to which I have referred.

I ought not to pass unnoticed the observations with which the right hon. gentleman commenced his address. The right hon. gentleman has, with candour and temper, referred to the delay which elapsed between Thursday and Sunday in forming a Cabinet, and I think the House will agree with me that he has acquitted me—at least I understood him to do so—of being the cause of that delay. The right hon. gentleman seems to have misapprehended the decision which, on my part, I thought was singularly precise and definite. The right hon. gentleman has referred to a controversy between us which has not appeared before the House on the conduct of the Opposition in the course which they took on the motion for the second reading of the University Bill. I have no wish to enter into any discussion on this subject. The right hon. gentleman will bear me out that in my letter to Her Majesty I at least did not shrink from arguing the question and vindicating on constitutional grounds the course which we took. I refrain from further alluding to this subject, but I must say, in passing, I thought it was a most gracious condescension on the part of Her Majesty, to deign to become the medium of communications in order, to use Her Majesty's language, "to prevent, if possible, misconceptions." (Cheers.) As to the charge against myself that I did not take sufficient pains or exhaust the means of forming a Cabinet on the occasion, and which appears to have been the cause of the hesitation in the right hon. gentleman's mind, I hope that, as the right hon. gentleman has read a passage on that head, I may also read a passage from my letter to Her Majesty on the subject. In it I say :—

"The charge against the Leader of the Opposition personally, that by 'his summary refusal' to undertake your Majesty's Government he was failing in his duty to your Majesty and the country, is founded altogether

on a gratuitous assumption by Mr. Gladstone, which pervades his letter, that the means of Mr. Disraeli to carry on the Government were not 'exhausted.' A brief statement of facts will at once dispose of this charge. Before Mr. Disraeli, with due deference, offered his decision to your Majesty, he had enjoyed the opportunity of consulting those gentlemen with whom he acts in public life, and they were unanimously of opinion that it would be prejudicial to the interests of the country for a Conservative Administration to attempt to conduct your Majesty's affairs in the present House of Commons. What other means were at Mr. Disraeli's disposal? Was he to open negotiations with a section of the late Ministry—(loud laughter)—and waste days in barren interviews, vain applications, and the device of impossible combinations? Was he to make overtures to the considerable section of the Liberal party who had voted against the Government—namely, the Irish Roman Catholic gentlemen? Surely, Mr. Gladstone could not seriously contemplate this? Impressed from experience, obtained in the very instances to which Mr. Gladstone refers, of the detrimental influence upon Government of a crisis unnecessarily prolonged by hollow negotiations, Mr. Disraeli humbly conceived that he was taking a course at once advantageous to the public interests, and tending to spare your Majesty unnecessary anxiety by at once laying before your Majesty the real position of affairs."

(Cheers.) I spoke particularly from the experience which I, then myself inexperienced in public affairs, obtained when acting with Lord Derby and witnessing the course he took with reference to the Government of 1852, and if it be, as I hold, one of the greatest disadvantages of these political crises that so much public time should be wasted, that Parliament should become dislocated, that public business should be postponed or measures given up, and that the public mind should be disturbed, I consider I was doing my duty when I took every possible means to make the period during which the right hon. gentleman was absent from office as short as possible. While upon this subject, I beg to say that although I did not presume to give any advice to Her Majesty as to whom she should send for, as this is a peculiar right of the Crown with which no one ought to interfere, yet, in speaking of the difficulties of the position in which Her Majesty was placed, I did give my opinion that I thought the cause for the resignation of the right hon. gentleman and his colleagues was hardly adequate to the great event which had occurred. It appeared to me that, under the circumstances of the case, the right hon. gentleman was scarcely justified in the course he pursued, because we must remember that the unfortunate University Bill had been unpopular in this House from the beginning, and that a large section of the Liberal party opposed it on the same grounds on which it was opposed by gentlemen on this side of the House—namely, that it sacrificed the educational interests of Ireland to the claims of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. When we took that line in debate, it was with a complete anticipation that every gentleman connected with the Roman Catholic interest in Ireland would support Her Majesty's Ministers. (Ironical cheers and laughter from the Ministerial

side.) But I said it was possible that the right hon. gentleman, in consequence, I will not say of a hasty, but, as I think, of an unfortunate, expression he used a month ago when he introduced the Bill, might feel his honour concerned so far as to be obliged to resign office. As regards his honour a statesman cannot be too nice and scrupulous; but I thought the right hon. gentleman's honour was vindicated by the act of resignation, and that he might return to office without the slightest difficulty. (Hear, hear.)

I am quite aware that the counsel I humbly recommended to Her Majesty in these negotiations may have been disappointing to some of my supporters in this House—(cries of "No, no," from the Opposition)—and to many of my supporters in the country; but I would fain believe that, when they have given a mature and an impartial consideration to all the circumstances, they will not visit my conduct with a verdict of unqualified condemnation. (Cheers.) I believe that the Tory party at the present time occupies the most satisfactory position which it has held since the days of its greatest statesmen, Mr. Pitt and Lord Grenville. It has divested itself of those excrescences which are not indigenous to its native growth, but which in a time of long prosperity were the consequence partly of negligence, and partly, perhaps, in a certain degree, of ignorance of its traditions. (Laughter from the Ministerial side.) We are now emerging from the fiscal period in which almost all the public men of this generation have been brought up. All the questions of trade and navigation, of the incidence of taxation, and of public economy, are settled. But there are other questions not less important, and of deeper and higher reach and range, which must soon engage the attention of the country. The attributes of a Constitutional Monarchy, whether the aristocratic principle should be recognised in our Constitution, and if so in what form—whether the Commons of England shall remain an estate of the realm, numerous but privileged and qualified, or whether they should degenerate into an indiscriminate multitude—(a laugh, and "Hear, hear,")—whether a National Church shall be maintained, and if so, what shall be its rights and duties; the functions of Corporations, the sacredness of endowments—(cheers)—the tenure of landed property, the free disposal and even the existence of any kind of property—(cheers and laughter)—all these institutions and all those principles, which have made this country free and famous, and conspicuous for its union of order with liberty, are now impugned, and in due time will become great and "burning" questions. (Cheers.) I think it is of the utmost importance that when that time—which may be nearer at hand than we imagine—arrives there shall be in this country a great Constitutional Party, distinguished for its intelligence as well as for its organisation, which shall be competent to lead the people

and direct the public mind. And, Sir, when that time arrives, and when they enter upon a career which must be noble, and which I hope and believe will be triumphant, I think they may perhaps remember, and not perhaps, with unkindness, that I at least prevented one obstacle from being placed in their way, when, as the trustee of their honour and their interests, I declined to form a weak and discredited Administration. (Loud and prolonged cheering.)